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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000581

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WARNER/SINGH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/28/2016
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PTER](#) [KISL](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: MGLE01: SAAD HARIRI TO HOLD JOINT PRESS
CONFERENCE WITH HASSAN NASRALLAH

Classified By: JEFFREY FELTMAN, AMBASSADOR. Reason: Section 1.4 (b).

11. (S) Summary: In a 2/27 meeting with the Ambassador, Saad Hariri revealed that he would hold a joint press conference with Hassan Nasrallah, Secretary-General of Hizballah on 2/28. The press conference will come at the end of Hariri's private meeting with Hizballah and will cover three areas: arms of the Palestinians outside the recognized camps, relations with Syria, and the presidency. Although Hariri did not expect Hizballah to support openly his position on the presidency, he assured the Ambassador that, in return for Hariri's oral support for the principle of Lebanon's right to resistance as long as Sheba'a Farms are occupied, Nasrallah will offer tacit support for the removal of President Lahoud. The Ambassador expressed extreme reservations: Hariri would again recognize the resistance without winning any real concessions from Hizballah. Hariri seemed to be following Michel Aoun's footsteps. But Hariri was confident that he could make progress with Nasrallah. (Other topics with Hariri discussed septel.) End summary.

12. (S) Saad Hariri, in a meeting with the Ambassador and PolChief, revealed that he has been talking regularly with Hizballah officials, including Hassan Nasrallah. Subjects of the conversations have been Syrian-Lebanese relations and the investigation into Rafiq Hariri's assassination. On February 28, Hariri will receive Nasrallah at the Hariri home in Beirut. At the end of the meeting, they will appear in a joint press conference. Hariri, in a prepared statement, will say that Lebanon has a right to resistance as long as Sheba'a Farms remain occupied. He will acknowledge that Hizballah was instrumental in freeing Lebanese lands from Israeli occupation and declare that there are still occupied Lebanese lands. Hariri said that his allies in the March 14th movement knew of, and accept, his talks with Hizballah as well as his strategy for the press conference.

13. (S) The Ambassador cautioned that Hariri seemed to be joining a list of Lebanese political figures who believe they can "bring Hizballah around" by making statements in favor of the resistance, while not gaining anything tangible in return. Hariri will look, publicly, to be doing the same thing as Michel Aoun. The Ambassador warned that the image of Hariri supporting the principle of resistance will overshadow any quiet political discussions he might have with Nasrallah. Hariri said that he would go no further than he already has in supporting Hizballah. In exchange for repeating his rhetorical support for Hizballah, Hariri thought he could get them to make a statement critical of armed Palestinians outside recognized Palestinian camps. He added that Hizballah was prepared to accept the departure of Emile Lahoud from the presidency. Only the question of

naming his successor remained. Hariri said that although Nasrallah was ready to accept the president's departure, he would not say so publicly. Hariri said he will be satisfied if Nasrallah acknowledges the need for dialogue on the future of the office -- that will signal to people that Nasrallah will not protect Lahoud.

14. (S) The Ambassador warned Hariri that his public support for the resistance would not be welcomed by the USG. As bad as the Aoun-Nasrallah document was, it at least did not contain the word resistance. Worse, if Hariri's statement is not accompanied by any tangible concessions from Hizballah, it will seem like a victory for Nasrallah and further the perception that Hizballah is in the most favorable position of all Lebanese parties, that is, being sought out and praised by all. Hariri dismissed the Ambassador's warnings by saying that he did not go through so much in order to "look like Michel Aoun." Hariri assured us that he would insist that Nasrallah's statement make mention of some concession from their side, or Hariri would distance himself from Hizballah in his own statement. "I don't want to look like I am doing them (Hizballah) favors," Hariri said.

15. (S) The Ambassador later contacted Minister of Telecommunications Marwan Hamadeh (who reports to Walid Jumblatt) by phone, to ask whether Hariri had cleared his strategy for dialogue with Nasrallah with his allies. Yes, Hamadeh said, "and we don't mind dialogue -- we need dialogue." But, while staying circumspect on the presumably tapped phone lines, Hamadeh added that "Walid is not entirely comfortable with what's happening tomorrow." The Ambassador expressed deep concern to Hamadeh. Separately, the Ambassador cautioned Ghattas Khoury, who advises Hariri, that Hariri must be extremely careful in his public remarks not to make it appear as though Nasrallah is establishing a

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coalition against UNSCR 1559. With Khoury, the Ambassador reviewed why the international community rejects the concept that Sheba'a Farms are Lebanese territory.

16. (S) Comment: Unlike Aoun, Hariri did not surprise us with a fait accompli with Hizballah. But like Aoun, Hariri thinks he, and he alone, has the wisdom and charisma to charm Hizballah into becoming a more legitimate Lebanese organization that accepts the inevitability of eventual disarmament. Hariri's initiative with Nasrallah, dismaying as it is, needs to be seen in the context of two issues here: First, the national dialogue is scheduled to start under Speaker Berri's leadership on March 2. By meeting with Nasrallah publicly ahead of that dialogue Hariri no doubt thinks he is strengthened, as Aoun will not be able to count on Hizballah's automatic support. Second, the removal of Lahoud is key goal of Hariri. The March 14 alliance cannot remove Lahoud without winning the backing (or at least neutrality) of either the Aoun bloc or Hizballah/Amal. Aoun's price is an Aoun presidency, something Hariri and his coalition are unwilling to pay. That leaves Hizballah/Amal as the potential partners in removing and replacing Lahoud. For Hizballah, this is an ideal situation: Hizballah simply waits for the highest bidder. Both Aoun and Hariri would argue that this is merely a tactical arrangement, that after each accomplishes his short-term goals of neutralizing the other, then they can focus more effectively on Hizballah disarmament. We doubt coddling Hizballah now will make disarmament easier, and we will continue to raise our concerns.

FELTMAN